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Recommended Citation

Melady, T. P. and Kikoski, J.F. (1985). The Attempted Assassination Of The Pope. *Orbis* 28(4), 775-801.

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THE ATTEMPTED ASSASSINATION OF THE POPE

by Thomas P. Melady and John F. Kikoski

On October 26, 1984, in Rome's central courthouse, Judge Ilario Martella formally announced that four Turks and three Bulgarians would be tried on charges of complicity in a plot to assassinate Pope John Paul II on May 13, 1981. This followed a May 1984 Italian judicial report that asked for the indictment of a slightly larger group of six Turks and three Bulgarians in this case.¹ Worldwide interest in the affair, which had waned following the July 1981 trial, conviction, and life sentence of Mehmet Ali Agca, the sole assailant in custody, waxed again. With the indictments of individual actors, attention also focused upon the grave accusations that have been levelled both directly and indirectly against Eastern bloc state-actors, Bulgaria and the Soviet Union, as responsible for the conception, planning, and full support of the execution of this crime.

These indeed are weighty charges. To attempt to assassinate the Pope, given his unique status for people of all backgrounds is shocking enough, even for our era. But the implication of members of the world community could make this the gravest act of attempted destabilization of the decade, if not the postwar era. It is also evident that should a clear, credible case be made for the involvement of Bulgarian agents, worldwide conclusions would be drawn about the role in this affair of the chief Warsaw Pact state. We are deeply concerned that nothing should imperil the maintenance of sound relations between the West and the Soviet Union and her allies. But this affair must be confronted; it will not go away, given the slow but steady pace of Italian justice, and worldwide doubts, suspicions, and rumors. This matter will continue to intrude upon

¹ *New York Times*, October 27, 1984. Two Turks, Agca and Omer Mersan, whose indictments and trial were requested in the May 1984 report were not listed in the formal indictment of October 1984. The remaining seven individuals were indicted. The Turks who will be tried are Musa Serdar Celebi, right-wing Gray Wolf leader in West Germany; Bekir Celenk, high-ranking Turkish Mafia boss; Oral Celek, the Pope's co-assailant in St. Peter's Square; and Omer Bagci, a minor Gray Wolves figure. The Bulgarians included Todor Aivasov and Zehlyo Vasilev, Bulgarian embassy employees, and Sergei Antonov, a manager of Bulgaria's Balkan Air — all three of Rome. In addition, Judge Martella also stated that one of the indicted Turks, Oral Celik, fired a third shot that wounded the Pope. The other two shots came from Mehmet Ali Agca.

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the world's conscience and its consciousness until, upon full examination, the truth obtains.

Given the unique situation, this article explores three questions: (1) What circumstances led to the attempted assassination; (2) What actors — individuals and states — were involved in those circumstances; and (3) Was there indeed a conspiracy to kill the Pope?

The authors understand (as should the reader) that conspiracies are not intended by their perpetrators to be uncovered. Therefore, this work does not seek to answer definitively each of the many and complex questions this case poses. While drawing upon a number of sources, it essentially follows what we term (and shall shortly explain as) the Albano Report on the assassination attempt and the events leading up to it; for that is by far the most thoroughly investigated and corroborated account.

This article first treats the published reports both of Italian judicial authorities and a handful of investigators as they determined the nature of the affair. Second, it examines Mehmet Ali Agca's background, and sketches the links leading to the events of May 13, 1981. It then focuses upon a series of significant episodes or puzzles about the case from which a pattern or mosaic may emerge. Next, it examines the interests of the indicted and accused actors. Last, it suggests a second option open to the world community in dealing with this affair.

Published Reports About a Conspiracy

The reports about a possible conspiracy started within days of the shooting. *La Stampa* of Turin reported that Judge Luciano Infelisi, the magistrate who signed Agca's original arrest warrant on May 14 stated: "For us, there is documentary proof that Mehmet Ali Agca did not act alone."² In September 1981, two months after Agca's July trial, Judge Severino Santiapichi, in his fifty-one-page *Statement of Motivation* summing up the evidence at hand and relating the rationale for Agca's life sentence concluded:

It is unthinkable that he could have undertaken this difficult project in absolute autonomy, or for his private reasons. . . . Grave questions arise concerning the possibility of material complicity in the crime and a plot at high levels. . . . Everything points to the conclusion that Agca was no more than the emerging point of a deep conspiracy, complex and threatening, orchestrated by secret forces, carefully planned and directed down to the smallest detail.³

This conclusion was at variance with both the Western and communist

² Claire Sterling, *The Time of the Assassins* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1983), p. 3, citing *La Stampa* of Turin, May 15, 1981. Sterling, more than any other journalist, has pursued this case doggedly and, because of her efforts, helped to bring the facts to light.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

press which loosely and initially labelled Agca a lone, deranged gunman, a religious fanatic, a right-wing neo-fascist ideologue, or a "meta-terrorist" — one who engages in such an act for its own sake — labels and labeling which persist to the present. Following Agca's conviction, the media generally lost interest in vigorously pursuing the case, whether because of its apparent closure, the difficulty of securing reliable information in this affair, or due to a marked reluctance by some of the elite press to confront the possible international implications that might result from a searching investigation.⁴ But authorities within the Italian judiciary did not see Agca as having acted alone. Indeed, the evidence in hand (even within hours of the act) and the suspicion it raised were sufficiently strong, that in November 1981 Judge Ilario Martella was given the charge of re-opening the case.

There matters rested publicly until journalist Claire Sterling placed Agca's attempted assassination in a new light in a September 1982 *Reader's Digest* article, "The Plot to Kill the Pope," in which she wrote, "As I learned in months of investigation, there is hard evidence that Agca was an instrument in an elaborate international plot."⁵ She proceeded to connect Agca to shadowy figures of the gun-running and drug-smuggling "Turkish Mafia" that had close ties with the Bulgarian secret service.

In an NBC White Paper, *The Man Who Shot The Pope: A Study in Terrorism*, broadcast on September 21, 1982, Marvin Kalb added a searing motive for the attempted assassination. Karol Wojtyla left Poland in the fall of 1978 a cardinal; he returned in the summer of 1979 a Pope. His triumphal homecoming in June triggered a tremendous surge of Polish pride, enthusiasm, and self-assertion. By August 1980, Poland was convulsed by mass demonstrations and strikes demanding the freedoms of speech and assembly, a freer Church, and, most significantly of all, an autonomous Solidarity. The chance for Soviet military intervention loomed large. But the Polish regime compromised, and Solidarity, surprisingly, was recognized by the Government as an independent trade union, while the threatened Soviet invasion never materialized. This occurred, Kalb reported, because

. . . in early August, as the crisis escalated, the Pope sent an envoy to the Kremlin, whom we are pledged not to identify. He delivered an extraordinary handwritten letter, in Russian, from the Pope to Soviet leader Brezhnev. It said that though the Pope was the head of a universal Church, he still was a Pole, and deeply

⁴ For a thorough treatment of media coverage of this affair and of the reluctance of the "elite press" to more actively pursue this story, see Michael Ledeen, "The Bulgarian Connection and the Media," *Commentary*, June 1983, pp. 45-50. The first break in this general media treatment came on December 30, 1981, when ABC Rome Bureau Chief Bill Blakemore reported on *World News Tonight* that Italian authorities were investigating the case as a possible international conspiracy (ABC News, *World News Tonight*, broadcast December 30, 1981).

⁵ Claire Sterling, "The Plot to Murder The Pope," *Reader's Digest*, September 1982, p. 72.

affected by developments in Poland. And if the Russians moved against Poland, he would lay down the crown of St. Peter and return to his homeland to stand shoulder to shoulder with his people.⁶

In 1983 two separate book-length treatments of the attempted assassination were published: *The Time of the Assassins* by Claire Sterling, author of the authoritative work on international terrorism, *The Terror Network*; and *The Plot to Kill the Pope* by Paul B. Henze, former member of the National Security Council under President Jimmy Carter, who had a strong prior background in Turkish affairs, and presently is a research scholar with the Rand Corporation.

In her book, Sterling expanded in thorough detail upon her earlier 1982 thesis. She held that the Turkish Mafia had carefully selected an assassin with a right-wing Gray Wolf-terrorist image that deliberately was burnished as he was handled by the Gray Wolf network in Europe in the months before the attempted assassination.

In reality the Gray Wolves involved here were working for the Turkish Mafia, which was controlled by the Bulgarian secret service, DS (Darzhavna Sigurnost), which was working for the Soviet KGB. This last was my conclusion. Readers could draw their own.⁷

Concurring with Sterling's thesis, Henze is less circumspect in his judgment:

Historical, inferential, circumstantial and solid factual evidence all point in the same direction to explain the plot against John Paul II — toward Moscow. The probability that the Kremlin leadership and the KGB were the architects of the plot to kill John Paul II is far greater in 1983 than it seemed in 1981. It is likely to be even greater in 1984 and 1985.⁸

Henze's words were prescient in light of the unofficial publication on June 10, 1984, of excerpts from a seventy-eight-page report filed by Italian State Prosecutor Antonio Albano. This report in turn was based on approximately 25,000 pages of testimony, information, and corroborating investigation assembled by Judge Martella since November 1981.

Albano's report, actually filed on May 8, 1984, asked for the indictment of six Turks and three Bulgarians for conspiring to assassinate the Pope, and accused the Bulgarian secret police of recruiting Agca to shoot John Paul II, thus seeking to weaken the Solidarity movement and to dampen the convulsions accompanying it. The report concluded: "... some political figure of great power took note of this grave situation and, mindful of the vital needs of the Eastern bloc, decided it was nec-

⁶ NBC White Paper, *The Man Who Shot The Pope: A Study in Terrorism*, broadcast September 21, 1982, pp. 13-14. NBC was extremely active in its investigation of this case.

⁷ Sterling, *The Assassins*, p. 113.

⁸ Paul B. Henze, *The Plot to Kill The Pope* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1983), p. 194 provides a most sound and scholarly treatment.

essary to kill Pope Wojtyla."⁹ There has been prior reference to the seven indictments which were handed down and trials ordered on October 26, 1984. Understanding the common thrust of these separate published reports, we now turn to an examination of the background of the assailant we most know about to this point.

Mehmet Ali Agca and the Trail to St. Peter's Square

Born to a poor family in 1958 and largely raised in the provincial Turkish city of Malatya, Mehmet Ali Agca was an unusual child. Quiet, somewhat of a loner and aloof, studious and highly intelligent, he was not marked by excessive, or even mild Islamic religiosity. Nor is there any record of Agca's involvement during his adolescence with any political group amidst the waves of political convulsions and terrorism that wracked Turkey from 1969 to 1980. Perhaps it should be remembered later that during the last year of his studies in Malatya, Agca told his brother, "I won't be a teacher for T.L. 10,000 a month [then equivalent to about \$250]. I will find a way to earn a lot more money in this system."¹⁰

Remembered as a top student at his secondary school, in 1976 Agca took and passed a university entrance examination (particularly difficult for a student from the provinces), and earned admission to the Faculty of History and Geography at the University of Ankara which he entered that fall. Two years later he submitted himself to a second such examination and earned a score high enough to gain admission to the prestigious Economics Faculty at the University of Istanbul. While again there is no record of any religious or political involvement by Agca during this period, several points are worth noting here.

During his interrogation, Agca told Italian authorities that in the summer of 1977 he had forty days of terrorist training in a PLO camp in Syria, helped there by two friends from Malatya, Sedat Sirri Kadem and Teslim Tore, both violent young leftists. Further, on December 13, 1977, Agca began to be paid. From that date until December 29, 1978, Agca received at least \$16,000, deposited into his accounts at various locations throughout Turkey — certainly a fortune to an impoverished student fresh from the provinces.

The Albano Report helps us here for it states that for some years prior to 1980, Agca earned "lucrative sums" for smuggling "arms, cigarettes, drugs, anything" working under Turkish Mafia bosses Abuzer Ugurlu and Bekir Celenk. It should be noted that both Ugurlu and Celenk

⁹ New York Times, June 10, 1984, hereafter cited as Albano Report.

¹⁰ Henze, *The Plot*, p. 33.

were in charge of tens if not hundreds of millions of dollars of drugs shipped from Turkey to the West, and arms shipped from the East to Turkey. The entrepôt point for these shipments was Bulgaria, the most obedient of East European states, and the official, hugely profitable and subversive Bulgarian state import-export agency, Kintex, which is run by the Bulgarian secret service, DS.¹¹

Henze, who possesses a special expertise in Turkish affairs, observed that during this approximate period "the Soviet Union has invested more in destabilizing Turkey through terrorism and subversion than it has spent on any single country since Vietnam." Henze cites Turkish authorities who believe the cost from 1977-1980 alone was over \$1 billion. He further points to large arms shipments from Bulgaria (among other sources), terrorist training, and the provision of large sums of cash to subversive groups.¹²

In December 1978 the largest single deposit, \$8,000, was made to Agca's accounts. This is significant, for on February 1, 1979, the influential editor of the respected Istanbul daily, *Milliyet*, Abdi Ipekci was murdered. Shot outside his home on a snowy night by two or three only fleetingly seen men, one of Turkey's most moderate-liberal, pro-Greek-Turkish reconciliation, and pro-Western voices was silenced in an act that shocked Turkish society. Despite massive police activity, and rewards of over \$100,000, no break in the case occurred for months.

On June 25, 1979, an anonymous telephone caller told police to pick up "Ali" at the Marmara Cafe, a rightist-Gray Wolf gathering place in Istanbul. Upon arresting Ali — Mehmet Ali Agca — Turkish police were surprised by his ready confession to the Ipekci assassination — especially since the automatic penalty was death by hanging. This particularly intrigued Nahir Erman, the attorney who represented the Ipekci family at Agca's trial and the man who discovered the trail of bank deposits. "Nobody would ask to be hanged when not a thing could be pinned on him," was Erman's conclusion.¹³ His Turkish interrogators found Agca to be mentally normal, of quick intelligence, self-possessed, and a master obfuscator — qualities he evidenced again to Italian authorities. Agca stated that he had taken neither money nor instructions from anyone and claimed to be what might be termed again a "meta-terrorist" — one above political ideologies, engaging in terrorism for its own sake. He made no mention of religion. The Albano Report sheds light here; it states that "on orders from the Turkish Mafia — that is,

Abuzer Ugurlu — Agca participated in the murder of the Turkish editor Abdi Ipekci."

Much Turkish public opinion, the Western press, and the Soviet and communist media in particular branded Agca a rightist and a Gray Wolf, despite the fact that then and to this writing no evidence of Agca's membership in, or sponsorship by, any political group has ever been produced. What Agca did establish in this affair was his efficiency at murder, his coolness and toughness under pressure of interrogation, and his rightist credentials worldwide.

Four months after his arrest, on October 24, 1979, Agca announced to a shocked courtroom "I did not kill Ipekci, but I know who did." As though a signal to his conspirators to arrange his escape, a month later, on the night of November 23, Mehmet Ali Agca walked through a series of locked doors in Turkey's tough Kartal-Maltepe prison in a soldier's uniform and out the main gate — certainly not the act of a man without the help or money of others. A day after his escape, Agca dropped a letter to Ipekci's *Milliyet* threatening the life of Pope John Paul II due in Turkey for a visit two days later, a letter that added another layer to Agca's international image — papal assailant.

There has been speculation concerning Agca's whereabouts between the fall of 1979 and the summer of 1980 (Turkey, Iran and the Soviet Union have been suggested). What is certain is that Agca crossed from Kapikule, Turkey, into Kapitan Andreevo, Bulgaria, bearing a false Indian passport made out to Yoginder Singh "without particular controls or formalities."¹⁴ Agca was in Bulgaria for about two months. While in Sofia, Agca claimed to have stayed at several deluxe hotels; he certainly stayed quite openly at the Hotel Vitosha — one of Sofia's newest and most plush. The Vitosha was a known gathering place for the Turkish Mafia and, "as he was advised to do in Turkey," Agca met in room 911 with Omer Mersan.¹⁵

A fellow Turk, Mersan was connected with the Vardar Export-Import Company in Munich, Germany. More than that, Mersan was listed in Swiss and German police files as a heroin trafficker, was described as a "wheeler-dealer agent extremely well-connected with the Bulgarian authorities, dedicated to a traffic of arms, drugs and contraband of all kinds," and had close dealings with both Abuzer Ugurlu and Bekir Celenk.¹⁶ He not only had reserved Agca's room at the Hotel Vitosha, but, according to the Albano Report again, provided money and documents that allowed Agca to stay well beyond the thirty hours normally

¹¹ Sterling, *The Assassins*, p. 208.

¹² See Paul B. Henze, "The Long Effort to Destabilize Turkey," *Wall Street Journal*, October 7, 1981, for a condensed but thorough account.

¹³ Sterling, *The Assassins*, p. 49.

¹⁴ Albano Report.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Sterling, *The Assassins*, pp. 223-25; see also Albano Report.

allotted Turks in Bulgaria. Mersan also helped furnish Agca with the passport he carried when he was seized in Rome. The Turkish passport number 136635 was issued August 11, 1980, to a Faruk Ozgun who genuinely lived in Nevsehir, Turkey. Mersan also arranged contact with high-ranking Turkish Mafia Godfather Bekir Celenk who, in turn, set up a number of meetings with a Bulgarian secret service agent "Sotir Kolev." Kolev in fact was Todor S. Aivasov, ostensibly the treasurer of the Bulgarian Embassy in Rome.¹⁷ Oral Celik, one of Agca's Malatyan friends and a "rough right-wing hood from early youth" who also worked for Mafia chieftain Bekir Celenk was present as well.¹⁸ Celik was to be with Agca in St. Peter's Square on May 13, 1981.

Here, as the plan was being discussed in the summer of 1980, it is worth noting that Solidarity was emerging in Poland as an autonomous trade union. Its autonomy directly contradicted the ideologically legitimated monopoly of power of the Polish communist party, and posed a mortal and pervasive threat to Kremlin rule not only in Poland, but in Eastern Europe, and among minorities in Russia itself. Solidarity and the widespread popular turmoil it both reflected and inspired provided the backdrop to these meetings during the summer of 1980.

The mechanics of the plan were as follows. First, with the highly placed, proven, and reliable Bekir Celenk as the middleman, the Bulgarian secret service contracted with Agca and Oral Celik to plan and assassinate the Polish Pope, John Paul II. Second, through Celenk, the Bulgarians would pay Agca, Celik, and Musa Sedar Celibi three million Deutsche marks (\$1.25 million) to be divided equally. Celibi, right-wing Turkish Gray Wolves leader in West Germany and Celenk associate, would provide cash, assistance, and rightist cover during Agca's coming peregrinations in Europe, in effect leasing Celebi's continental Turkish organization for fee. Next, after the assassination, the Bulgarians would provide for Agca's and Celik's flight from Italy to Bulgaria via TIR truck or diplomatic means. Last, "safe and undisturbed refuge" in the Bulgarian Black Sea port of Varna would be provided.¹⁹

On Bekir Celenk's instruction, Agca called Gray Wolf leader Celebi in Frankfurt from Sofia to initiate the plan. On August 30, 1980, Agca and Oral Celik met another Turk with a Gray Wolf-Turkish Mafia background, a lieutenant of Ugurlu, Abdullah Catli, who provided Agca with his fake Ozgun passport. Agca then exited Bulgaria to begin many months of criss-crossing European travel with Gray Wolf assistance. From then until May 13, 1981, Agca is thought to have visited up to twelve

¹⁷ Albano Report.

¹⁸ Sterling, *The Assassins*, p. 92.

¹⁹ Albano Report.

European countries and to have spent approximately \$50,000. During that period, he lived lavishly, sought no work, wore expensive clothing and accessories, possessed ready cash, and placed frequent international telephone calls. While Agca was enjoying the good life, plans were being formulated and agreements made which would culminate in his actions on May 13, 1981.

During November and December of 1980, and January, April, and May of 1981, Agca met frequently in Rome with Aivasov (whom he had met in Sofia as Sotir Kolev); Zhelyo Vasilev, secretary to the Bulgarian military attaché; and Sergei Antonov, deputy director of Bulgarian Balkan Air in Rome. All were Bulgarian secret service agents. A number of meeting spots have been specifically identified, including Aivasov's apartment at 36 Via Galiani. According to the Albano Report, during January 1981 there was discussion among these conspirators about the possibility of assassinating Solidarity leader Lech Walesa who visited Rome and the Pope for five days that month. There even was talk of simultaneously assassinating the Pope.

Among other stops on Agca's itinerary was a November stay in the luxurious resort of Hammamet, Tunisia, not too distant from the Libyan border. In December 1980, Agca and Celebi met for the first time in a Milan hotel. Agca, his friend Oral Celik, Gray Wolf Musa Sedar Celibi, and Turkish Mafia boss Bekir Celenk met at Zurich's Hotel Sheraton on March 31, 1981, to provide final agreement on the cash "provided by Bulgaria and paid over by Bekir Celenk."²⁰ Prior to this, Agca and Celik had contacted Otto Tintner in Vienna to secure a 9mm semiautomatic pistol he had obtained from Horst Grillmayer. Grillmayer came from a family of Nazis, had a reputation as a gun-runner, and traveled frequently to Eastern Europe (he was a frequent guest at the Hotel Vitosha) and to the Middle East (Turkey and Syria in particular). He also had ties with Ugurlu and Celenk.²¹ Transported to Switzerland, the weapon was left with another Gray Wolf, Omer Bagci, for later pickup.

Following further contact in Rome with the Bulgarians, Agca enrolled, paid his fees and attended one class at the Foreign Language School in Perugia to obtain Italian student status. Upon settling additional details with the Bulgarians in Rome, Agca then spent two weeks in Palma, Majorca. From Majorca, Agca called Celebi in Frankfurt, Celenk in Athens, and later Bagci in Switzerland, the latter to arrange for the pistol's pickup at the Milan railroad station. Upon his return to Rome on May 10, Agca met frequently with Celik and the three Bulgarians, Vasilev, Aivasov, and Antonov, to arrange the final details.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Henze, *The Plot*, p. 175.

On the appointed day, Antonov drove Agca and Celik to St. Peter's Square, stopping near his apartment to provide Celik with two pistols and two panic bombs. Aivasov apparently made his way to St. Peter's Square himself.

Around 3 p.m., they drove on to the Vatican, parking in front of the Canadian Embassy. . . . Together they made a final inspection of the Square. Aivasov left. The other three had coffee in a nearby bar. Around 4 p.m., Antonov left also. Agca and Celik returned to St. Peter's Square, where Agca fired on the Pope shortly after 5 p.m.²²

At the moment of its execution, the plot began to unravel. Oral Celik was to have set off the panic bombs to cover Agca's escape. Instead, he ran, by happenstance photographed from behind by an American, Lowell Newton. Why did Celik not follow through? The Albano Report indicates that Celik was Agca's best friend, "dearer to him than a brother." Sterling speculates that he was unable to kill Agca as instructed, that he lost his nerve and ran.²³ Agca himself has no final answer to this question: "I still ask myself this," he is quoted as saying, "because if the bombs had gone off, I would not be here now in my cell."²⁴ Celik may have escaped Rome according to a plan previously drawn up by the Bulgarians. It was at this point that Agca was seized and interrogated.

The Mosaic

Byzantine civilization is virtually synonymous with an art form that reached a zenith under its aegis, the mosaic—tiny, individual bits of variously hued material which constitute a form only when viewed together from some distance. It is perhaps fitting that we use this metaphor in more closely scrutinizing certain aspects of the circumstances that led to Mehmet Ali Agca's attempted assassination of John Paul II. For us as well, by examining specific and individual episodes, perhaps a form or pattern will emerge in this affair.

The Bank Deposits

As noted above, from December 13, 1977 (a date after his Palestinian training, but while still a student in Ankara), until December 29, 1978, Agca was paid. And paid what must have been, for a poor provincial boy, a munificent sum. Beyond the suspicions of who was paying sums to an assassin before his self-confessed act, a number of

²² Albano Report.

²³ *New York Times*, June 10, 1984.

²⁴ *New York Times*, October 29, 1984.

interesting points bear examination. Under handwriting analysis, not one deposit slip bore Agca's genuine signature, while all of his withdrawal slips did. Further, accounts were opened for him in Istanbul nine months before he arrived there as a student and even before he took the spring exams that qualified him for entrance. While deposits were made at a variety of locations throughout Turkey, withdrawals were always made in Istanbul. Henze calls this a classically clandestine *modus operandi* and states that Agca may have been "handled at arm's length" by Turks in collaboration with Bulgarians or Russians. He speculates: "All that we know is that somebody was in contact with him, somebody was seeing that he was kept obscure and clean and uncontaminated by ordinary terrorist connections that could have drawn him into premature trouble. But he was doing something for them—or at the very least absorbing well the training he was being given."²⁵

Although he registered for courses at the University of Istanbul for the 1978-79 academic year, there is no record of his academic activity and he took no final examinations. Nor is it known where he lived. The room he said was his seemed to have been unoccupied for months; the address given for one new bank account actually was a gas station.²⁶ Nor again is there a record of any political activities or associations by Agca during this period. We already have cited the Albano Report which stated that Agca had earned large sums through involvement with Abuzer Ugurlu's and Bekir Celenk's vast drug and gun smuggling operation with Bulgaria's Kintex. Henze suggests that Agca could have come to the special notice of Teslim Tore, his fellow Malatyan, during his summer, 1977, terrorist training. In the twisted world of Turkish terrorism, Tore then could have recommended him for particular assignment once Agca returned to Ankara.²⁷ While we are still uncertain about the nature of his activities in Istanbul, we do know that the largest single deposit made to Agca's new bank account, approximately \$8,000, was made one month before the Ipekci assassination.

The Ipekci Assassination

Mehmet Ali Agca may not be the real murderer of Abdi Ipekci. *There was no evidence.* The only thing they had on him was a composite drawing that looked something like Agca and any number of people. There were no witnesses before he confessed. The pistol was never found. Read the file. They had no case.²⁸

So spoke an unnamed senior policeman to Claire Sterling in Ankara.

²⁵ Henze, *The Plot*, p. 136.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 136-37.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

²⁸ Sterling, *The Assassins*, pp. 45-46, emphasis in original.

Why did Agca so readily affirm his guilt to a crime punishable by hanging? Who made the anonymous telephone call telling police to pick up "Ali"? Why did the tipster send police to a cafe with a reputation as a right-wing hangout? Why was he so quickly labeled by the press as a rightist Gray Wolf, even without evidence to substantiate the allegation? Why did no one come forward to collect the sizeable reward? Why did Agca tell the Court during his trial on October 24, 1979, that he had not killed Ipekci, but at the next session would tell who did? How, thereafter, did two pistols come into the hands of Agca and another inmate on November 5, 1979, in Kartal-Maltepe military prison, Turkey's toughest? ²⁹ Persuaded that he could not escape, even if he killed the hostages he had taken, Agca surrendered, his escape attempt foiled. Even more surprising after this episode, how could Agca have walked out of that same prison about three weeks later, on November 23, through a series of locked doors, and out the main gate without interested friends and rich assistance?

The Albano Report states: "on orders from the Turkish Mafia — that is, Abuzer Ugurlu — Agca participated in the murder of Turkish editor Abdi Ipekci." ³⁰ Turkish courts hold that Ugurlu ordered Abdi Ipekci's murder to stop Ipekci's exposure of Ugurlu's connections with the Turkish Mafia and the Bulgarians. ³¹

Agca's Threat to Pope John Paul II During His Visit to Turkey

On November 26, 1979, Agca threatened the life of Pope John Paul II who shortly was due in Turkey for a papal visit. By means of a garbled, rightist, Islamic fundamentalist message Agca drew nationwide and worldwide attention to himself.

Western imperialists, who fear that Turkey may establish a new Political, Military and Economic Force in the Middle East with brotherly Islamic countries, have rushed at a sensitive time to send Crusader Commander John Paul to Turkey under the mask of a religious leader. If this ill-timed and pointless visit is not cancelled, I will definitely shoot the pope. This is the only reason I escaped from prison. Besides, U.S. and Israeli responsibility for the repression in Mecca should be raised. Otherwise please don't exaggerate my quiet, bloodless and simple escape. ³²

This letter, could hardly have been motivated by Agca's Islamic faith — written by one who had seldom attended a mosque, drank alcohol, and

²⁹ Henze, *The Plot*, p. 151.

³⁰ Albano Report.

³¹ See David Shiflett, "Solving the Plot to Kill The Pope," *Reader's Digest*, October 1984, p. 88 for the latest *Digest* effort in this case.

³² Henze, *The Plot*, pp. 4-5.

was engaged in the sort of sordid life he led. While the letter siphoned off police strength to further protect the Pope (and aid Agca's escape), it also could have been intended to provide Agca with credentials of a future sort. A point to recall here is the tumultuous welcome the Pope received during his earlier homecoming visit to Poland in June 1979, and the impact it had upon the formation of Solidarity in 1980.

The Bulgarian Summer

Agca entered Bulgaria around July 10, 1980, under a false Indian passport "procured by Abuzer Ugurlu." ³³ He stayed there until August 31, 1980. There are two related points here: first, Bulgaria has a deserved reputation as Eastern Europe's toughest, most efficient police state; second, in the summer of 1980, Agca was a criminal of worldwide notoriety. As the *New York Times* editorialized: "Mehmet Ali Agca, a wanted killer in Turkey, came to Rome from Bulgaria where his record and face should have been known. His behavior was hardly furtive; he checked into Sofia's best hotels." ³⁴ The Bulgarians, particularly, should have known of Agca's identity and presence. And they did. There is evidence. He met there with Sotir Kolev, really Todor Aivasov. Aivasov's passport itself indicated he was in Sofia when Agca says he was. Further, there is the matter of the passport.

When police seized him in Italy, Agca still was traveling under the counterfeit passport of Faruk Ozgun. It carried a Turkish exit stamp for Kapikule, Turkey, dated August 30. It also carried a Bulgarian entry stamp for Kapitan Andreevo, Bulgaria, for August 31. Kapikule and Kapitan Andreevo are only a few hundred yards apart. Further, while the Bulgarian stamp may be genuine, the Turkish stamp is a forgery. ³⁵ In Bulgaria, of all states, such a feat, clumsy as it proved to be, can be accomplished only with the full cooperation of the state secret service.

The Turks

Many intimate connections of geography, association, and criminal business activity, bound this group of Turks together and to the Bulgarians. Abuzer Ugurlu, the Mafia boss who supervised so many of Agca's activities and movements came from Malatya, and had many years of close and hugely profitable criminal business dealings with Bulgaria and especially Kintex. Claire Sterling stated that one Western intelligence

³³ Albano Report.

³⁴ *New York Times*, December 18, 1982.

³⁵ Henze, *The Plot*, p. 165.

agency believed Ugurlu had been "recruited by the Bulgarian DS around 1974."³⁶ Ugurlu has been in a Turkish jail since March 1981 facing criminal charges unrelated to this case.

Bekir Celenk, his fellow Mafia chieftain came from Gaziantep, near Malatya. For years he oversaw vast shipments of contraband, including drugs from, and arms to, Turkey via Bulgaria's Kintex (which, for its services, exacted a percentage of each shipment's value). During a December 17, 1983, Sofia press conference, Celenk admitted being in Sofia at the Hotel Vitosha during July 1980, when Agca said he had met him, though Celenk denies any encounter. He has been in Bulgaria since October 1982, arriving just two days before Judge Martella issued an arrest warrant. He has not left. Again, according to Sterling's source, he had been a DS agent "long before Ugurlu."³⁷

Omer Mersan was a close and trusted associate of both Ugurlu and Celenk for years. He was deeply involved with them in a vast traffic in weapons, drugs and other contraband through the Vardar Export-Import Company of Munich, Germany, a front for the smuggling activity. Further, upon information Agca provided, Mersan admitted to German police very soon after the assassination that he had met with Agca in Sofia during the summer of 1980, but claimed he knew him only as "Metin." Extradited to Italy in late 1983, he admitted to Italian authorities that he had given false testimony "to safeguard Celenk from any possible connection to Agca." He also admitted giving money to Agca in Sofia on the instructions of Abuzer Ugurlu.³⁸

Musa Sedar Celebi was, through the Turkish Federation, head of the Gray Wolves in West Germany and had rightist-Gray Wolf connections throughout Europe. In addition, he was closely connected to Ugurlu and Celenk and was rumored to be involved with Turkish smuggling activities. He was extradited from Germany to Italy in October 1982 where he is still being held. Oral Celik, also from Malatya already has been described as a right-wing thug, long on Celenk's payroll. As such, he could have been a valuable connective link to Celebi, Celenk, and especially to his friend, Agca. He has not been seen since May 13, 1981, when he aided Agca in St. Peter's Square.

Agca in Europe

According to Claire Sterling, between August 1980 and May 1981, Agca criss-crossed twelve countries: Yugoslavia, Germany, Switz-

³⁶ Sterling, *The Assassins*, p. 225.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

³⁸ Albano Report.

erland, Tunisia, Austria, France, Great Britain, Belgium, Denmark, Hungary, Spain, and, in particular, Italy.³⁹ Additional serious questions arise here. How could a poor boy travel for as long and as luxuriously as Agca did — wearing expensive clothes, a gold Rolex watch on his wrist, dining in the finest restaurants, staying at exclusive hotels and resorts, while never working, never cashing a check and never short on funds? How could a provincial boy who had spent all but four years of his life in a Turkish province, who spoke only halting English besides his native Turkish, make travel and other arrangements so smoothly. The watchful and quiet support of a far-flung organization (such as Celebi's Gray Wolves) was both necessary and invaluable here.

According to the Albano Report, in November Agca made contact with Zhelyo Vasilev at the Bulgarian Embassy in Rome. Vasilev knew of the initial plans laid in Sofia and directed the operation in Rome, giving orders both to Aivasov and Antonov, and provided for Agca's financial needs, totaling about \$50,000, during his European travels. During November, December, January, April, and May, Agca often met with Vasilev at a number of confirmed spots in Rome: The Hotel Archimede, Doney's Via Veneto Cafe, the Piccadilly Bar on the Plaza Barberini, and Aivasov's 36 Via Galiani apartment among others. Agca provided a most detailed and accurate description of Aivasov's apartment, its layout, furniture, and even the bathroom, to Italian authorities. He also provided, according to the Albano Report, Aivasov's unlisted telephone number 327-2629 which, in a central point in their defense, Bulgarian authorities denied even existed. Agca also provided comprehensive, detailed, and verified physical and other descriptions of Vasilev, Aivasov, and Antonov — their habits, likes and dislikes, hobbies, language capabilities, families — and other information that only could have come from sustained and close personal contact.⁴⁰ The Bulgarians were, according to the exhaustive corroboration of the Albano Report, in the locations where Agca said they were during this period.

The same was true of Agca's Turkish collaborators. In December 1980, Agca met Gray Wolf Celibi face-to-face for the first time in a Milan hotel. Agca and Celibi then met Celik and Celenk in Zurich's Sheraton Hotel on March 31, 1981. It was agreed there that Agca, Celik and Celebi were to equally divide DM 3 million "provided by Bulgaria and paid over by Bekir Celenk."⁴¹ Between these two meetings Agca and Celik secured the Browning semiautomatic pistol in Austria, on telephoned instructions provided Celik by Bekir Celenk, from Otto Tintner

³⁹ Sterling, *The Assassins*, pp. 20-21.

⁴⁰ Albano Report.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

who, in turn, had secured the weapon from Horst Grillmaier. The Gray Wolf operative, Omer Bagci, in prison in Italy since June 1982, verified that he held the weapon for Agca during the period Agca specified and turned it over to him in the Milan railroad station on May 9, 1981.⁴²

Then there were the telephone calls. Following his April contact with the Bulgarians in Rome and registration for Italian student status in Perugia (on Vasilev's advice), Agca spent two weeks in Palma, Majorca. There he placed some significant calls. The first was to Musa Celebi in Frankfurt. Celebi was arrested by German authorities on November 3, 1982. Under interrogation, he first denied knowing Agca, then admitted having met a "Murat" in difficult financial straits in Milan during December 1980. He also initially denied being a party to the final agreement made in Zurich's Sheraton Hotel whereby Celenk promised to pay middleman's funds to Agca and to him. According to the Albano Report, Agca telephoned Celebi in Frankfurt from Majorca and was told that he, Celebi, and Celik had received payment from Bekir Celenk. According to a tape of this call made by authorities, Agca told Celebi: "I have received the money. . . . I will now go to Rome and finish the job."⁴³ The Albano Report states as "a certainty" that the money deposited in Celebi's account in Frankfurt was made during Agca's stay in Majorca.

Agca then called Celenk to make sure about the payments. Celenk (who was in Athens) verified payment during the call and stated that everything "was set to go."⁴⁴ Four days later Agca telephoned Bagci in Switzerland to arrange for pickup of the gun in Milan on May 9. Back in Rome from Milan, Agca and Celik met Vassilev in a YMCA hotel room from whence Vassilev reserved a room for Agca at the Pensione Isa near the Vatican. This fact dispelled one of the intriguing details that cropped up early in the case: who, in fluent Italian, had reserved a room at the Pensione Isa in the name of Agca when Agca spoke only the most rudimentary Italian?

The Abortive Plot Against Lech Walesa

One of the most bizarre episodes in this case concerns an abortive plot to assassinate Polish Solidarity leader Lech Walesa during his visit to Rome in January 1981. During that month, Agca met at Rome's Hotel Archimede with Sergei Antonov, and with all three Bulgarians at Aivasov's apartment to discuss the possibility of assassinating Walesa. According to Agca's statement, Walesa was to have been murdered by

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Henze, *The Plot*, p. 170.

⁴⁴ Albano Report.

means of a bomb placed in a small Fiat, parked just outside the Hotel Victoria, to be detonated by remote control. But the plan was called off because of an increased police presence there on the determined day. Yet, "Agca's detailed knowledge of Walesa's Rome schedule astounded Italian investigators. He knew which hotels Walesa had occupied and was familiar with the routes between the hotels. As he scouted the Hotel Victoria, Agca says he saw some painters at work — an accurate detail."⁴⁵

Agca possessed such astounding knowledge because of Luigi Scricciolo, head of the Foreign Department of the Italian Socialist Labor Confederation, had travelled to Poland to help Walesa establish Solidarity, had funneled Western labor union material support to Solidarity, was Walesa's host and coordinator of security in Rome—and had been a Bulgarian agent since 1976.⁴⁶ Scricciolo has said that his control, Ivan Tomov Dontchev, DS spy chief in Rome, pumped him for the smallest details of Walesa's visit which presumably then were passed on to Agca. Agca also identified Dontchev as a Bulgarian contact present at Aivasov's apartment. He said as well that he and Antonov discussed Walesa's possible assassination during a meeting at the Hotel Archimede — a meeting that Italian authorities also verified.⁴⁷

The Assassination

There has been previous mention of the Albano Report's chronology of the movements and activities of the Bulgarian agents and Turkish assassins on May 13 after a 1:00 p.m. lunch together "at the usual bar near Piazza Repubblica."⁴⁸ Oral Celik did not execute his part of the plan which included the detonation of panic bombs and the possible murder of Agca following the shooting of the Pope. Consequently, Agca was arrested and two notes were found on him.

The first was a note in Turkish of thorough final instructions that included suggested attire, avoidance of the Vatican or any place where attention might be drawn, down to the time for breakfast — 9:00 a.m. Most interesting were the entries for "May 13, Wednesday, appearance in Square; May 17, Sunday, perhaps appearance on the balcony; May 20, Wednesday, Square *without fail*."⁴⁹ The second note had five telephone numbers listed on it: those of the Bulgarian Embassy and consulate; the Balkan Air office where Antonov worked; and Aivasov's un-

⁴⁵ *Newsweek*, June 20, 1983, p. 41. See also Nicholas Gage's account in *The New York Times*, March 23, 1983.

⁴⁶ Henze, *The Plot*, pp. 72-74.

⁴⁷ Sterling, *The Assassins*, p. 208-09; see also Sterling's more complete report, "Agca's Other Story: The Plot to Kill Walesa," *New York Times*, October 27, 1984.

⁴⁸ Albano Report.

⁴⁹ See Sterling, *The Assassins*, p. 31 for the complete note; emphasis in original.

listed residence telephone number.⁵⁰ Although the Bulgarians, in their defense, claimed that Aivazov had no such unlisted telephone, in fact he did. And Agca's number was correct. The organized thoroughness of the first note, and the direct links of the second provided ample, initial proof to the Italians during the very earliest stages of the case of the existence of a conspiracy. Perhaps the Italian authorities were wise to be so prudent and discreet as not to disclose these small leads until they were able to pursue and develop them into something much more substantial.

The TIR Truck and Escape

Another layer of specific evidence of conspiracy to add to the growing mosaic concerns the planned escape of Agca and Celik from Rome to Bulgaria via Transport International Routier (TIR), trucks sealed by customs in their departing nation which, by international agreement, pass freely across borders unchecked until clearance by customs at their destination. At 6:00 p.m. on the day the Pope was shot, shortly after the assassination attempt, the Albano Report states, a "Bulgarian TIR Magirus, license number CK3572 and trailer number CE6176" left the Bulgarian Embassy in Rome for the Yugoslav frontier carrying "books, crockery, personal effects and so on." It had arrived from Sofia the day before containing an equally pedestrian cargo. Despite the listed ordinariness of the cargo, the Bulgarian Embassy had urgently asked TIR passage for the vehicle with customs procedures on embassy grounds—the only occasion the Bulgarians have requested such a procedure. To quote the Albano Report:

What was so immensely important and useful in the TIR's cargo that the Bulgarian Embassy should make such unique demands for urgency — EXACTLY ON MAY 13, 1981?

We must conclude that on board that TIR truck, hidden among those personal effects, was Oral Celik.

... The circumstances surrounding this TIR truck are of fundamental relevance (in) giving Agca the right to be believed. (emphasis in original)

The Mantarov Affair

In March 1983, Nicholas Gage of the *New York Times* wrote that a defecting Bulgarian official had told French intelligence "the plot to kill the Pope was devised by the KGB, the Soviet intelligence agency, and by the Bulgarian secret service, which many Western intelligence specialists consider subservient to Moscow."⁵¹ Jordan Mantarov, then age 48, ostensibly a deputy commercial attaché stationed at the Bulgarian

Embassy in Paris was identified by Claire Sterling as ranking Bulgarian secret service officer in Paris from 1979 to 1981.⁵² Mantarov told French authorities that he was a close friend of Dimiter Savov, a high-ranking official in the DS counterintelligence division in Paris. According to Mantarov: "when unrest mounted in Poland and the Pope supported the aspirations of Polish workers to organize into independent unions . . . the KGB began discussions with the Bulgarian intelligence service on a way to eliminate John Paul II."⁵³ Mantarov told French debriefers that Agca was selected to be the Pope's assassin because of his worldwide notoriety as a rightist after the Ipekci assassination, and because he had no association with a communist country. Mantarov also stated that after the Pope's assassination, Agca was to be killed. Gage continued that French intelligence agents who debriefed Mantarov "say they believe the account because other information he told them he learned from Mr. Savov has checked out. They would not offer examples."⁵⁴

Mantarov's information is important because it is the first contribution from a high-ranking Bulgarian defector *in place* during the time of the assassination. The Mantarov disclosures are intriguing for another reason. French intelligence claims that Mantarov defected in the summer of 1981. Yet there are some reports that he defected during the spring of that year.⁵⁵ If the latter is true, it would account for two occurrences. At a Mass a week before the assassination attempt, John Paul II told his Swiss Guards: "Let us pray that the Lord will keep violence and fanaticism far from the Vatican's walls." Next, *Le Quotidien de Paris* reported that French intelligence "dispatched two high-ranking officers to the Vatican on April 20, 1981, to personally convey warnings to the Pope of a possible attack."⁵⁶ If there is truth to the speculation that Mantarov defected not during the summer, but the spring of 1981, it could have been his information that provided the basis for the French warning to the Papacy. Moreover, if this is so, there is the chance that among the information that "checked out" (no examples given) is much if not all of Mantarov's story, including KGB initiation, coordination, and timing of the assassination plot, as well as the selection of the assassin.

Cui Bono? Cui Prodest?

Cui bono? Cui prodest? Whose good is served? Who is interested in this affair? These questions must be asked now that we have a

⁵² Sterling, *The Assassins*, p. 116.

⁵³ *New York Times*, March 23, 1983.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ *Time*, April 4, 1983, p. 38. The exact reported date of Mantarov's defection is April 11, 1981.

⁵⁶ *Le Quotidien de Paris*, December 18, 1982, cited in Sterling, *The Assassins*, p. 8. See also the Pope's words to his Swiss Guards also cited by Sterling from *Il Giornale Nuovo*, July 31, 1981.

⁵⁰ *Newsweek*, December 20, 1982, p. 59.

⁵¹ *New York Times*, March 23, 1983.

better understanding of both the trial that led to St. Peter's Square on May 13, 1981, and the particular mosaic that brought it about. In sum, the pattern of facts appears to be this: Mehmet Ali Agca shot Pope John Paul II with the close, intimate support of the Turkish Mafia, the Gray Wolves in Europe, and the planning of the Bulgarian secret service, most likely at the direction of the KGB.

Whose good is served by this? Who would be interested in the commissioning and execution of such an act? As Vatican observer Peter Hebblethwaite put it in a slightly different context just two months after the assassination attempt in 1981: "Everything the most rigorous judge could require is here, except for one thing—a clear motive."⁵⁷ Let us examine the motives of the various actors.

The various labels affixed to Agca soon after the shooting included: lone deranged gunman, Islamic fanatic, and right-wing terrorist. The facts are that Agca executed his act only with the aid of a complex, organized, and well-financed effort and that he was judged by psychologists, both in Turkey and Italy, to be mentally normal. Neither do his background, associations, or actions indicate any deep strain of religiosity. Indeed, the converse is more true. Nor can a case be made for his actions being motivated by deep-seated political beliefs; it is more accurate to say that no political associations or orientation of any depth ever have been verified. To agree even with his self-identification as a meta-terrorist strains belief. More likely, for an individual born to poverty, who placed international telephone calls to inquire about payment, he merely is a "gun for hire."⁵⁸

Nor can one rationally draw a motive from the various members who constituted the Turkish Mafia. Thieves, thugs, smugglers, murderers, men who, for pay, collaborated with age-old enemies of their nation to subvert Turkey—no reasonable person can extract a motive for them, alone and by themselves, to set out to murder a Roman Catholic Pope. The same is true for the Gray Wolves. A fanatically nationalistic, right-wing, paramilitary political party, which emphasized more the Turkish Central Asian past than Islam, no aims or actions of Pope John Paul II alone could trigger from them such a response as to cause his assassination at their hands.

This leaves the Bulgarian secret service and the government that stands behind it. In their active efforts to destabilize Turkey, Italy, and other European countries through the training and provision of arms to terrorists, and the supply of heroin and other drugs to foster the moral degradation of the West, the Bulgarian DS and its creature Kintex, in

particular, have established wide networks of terrorists, criminals, and corrupted officials throughout Europe, Turkey, and beyond. Kintex, in particular, through its handling of contraband cigarettes, liquor, jewelry, and high-tech products (among other legitimately traded commodities) was ideal for these purposes. Tightly controlled by the Russians to serve their own purposes, KGB officers at the top level and in each of DS seven departments report directly to Moscow. Moreover, Bulgaria is not shy about foreign assassinations—its agents in 1978 most probably having murdered one defector, Georgi Markov, and attempted the murder of another, Vladimir Kostov. But the fact remains: Bulgaria had no reason *per se* to assassinate the religious leader of the Catholic church; its Christian population is overwhelmingly orthodox and is relatively immune to a Roman Catholic Pope's appeal. Henry Kissinger agrees: "It had to be the Soviets. The Bulgarians have no interest in coming after the Pope."⁵⁹

There remains the Soviet Union. Richard Pipes, formerly President Reagan's senior specialist on Soviet affairs has stated: "If the Bulgarian intelligence service was involved, there is little doubt that the KGB would know."⁶⁰ Colonel Stefan Sverdlov, the highest ranking DS officer to defect to the West, stated it more plainly: "I do not doubt for one instant the role of the Bulgarian secret service in this attack. But if they did it, it was not of their own initiative."⁶¹ This squares with the famous statement of Todor Zhivkov, the Bulgarian leader who once stated as a matter of great pride that: "our political watch-dial is exact to the second with the watch of the Soviet Union . . . our watch is working toward Moscow time."⁶² The close, connective links between this, the most subservient and responsive of Russian East European satellites, and Moscow are well known. The same is true for the interstitial ties between the DS and the KGB. And the Russian motives are familiar.

The Russian Stakes

Of immense geostrategic and political importance to the Soviet Union, Poland sits astride the traditional European invasion route, which in modern history the French used once and the Germans twice. At the core of Eastern Europe, inhabited by a people who have never forgotten either their nationalism or their millennia-old Catholicism, Poland reflects the highest stakes for the Kremlin rulers. Jordan Mantarov related to French intelligence what he learned from Dimiter Savov, a fellow DS officer:

⁵⁹ *Washington Post*, January 3, 1983.

⁶⁰ *New York Times*, December 18, 1982.

⁶¹ *Time*, December 27, 1982, p. 42.

⁶² James Brown, *Bulgaria Under Communist Rule* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1970), p. 129.

⁵⁷ *National Catholic Reporter*, July 17, 1981.

⁵⁸ Although we know far less about Oral Celik, much the same may be true for him.

In 1979 the KGB concluded that the election of Karol Wojtyla as Pope the year before was engineered by Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Carter's national security advisor, who was born in Poland. Mr. Brzezinski's purpose, in this account of the KGB thinking, was to take advantage of the growing unrest in Poland and break its ties to Moscow. It is not clear on what basis the KGB might have reached such a belief.⁶³

Certainly, even without this byzantine and unproven hypothesis, Cardinal Wojtyla's words and actions following his election as Pope on October 16, 1978, gave credence to the KGB's fears. The outright challenge he laid down to communist rule during his triumphal return to Poland in June 1979 stimulated a euphoric wave that helped lead to the establishment of Solidarity in the 1980 "Polish Summer." The nationwide work-stoppages, demonstrations and general ferment that ensued led a scandal-ridden, ideologically bankrupt Communist Party and debt-ridden Poland to accept the Gdansk Agreement of August 31, 1980, in which, for the first time, a communist regime recognized an autonomous, free trade union as a legitimate power-contender—a concession anathema to Marxist doctrine.⁶⁴

But the stakes were even higher than Poland. In a Rand Corporation study, Alex Alexiev pointed out that with the accession of Karol Wojtyla to the Papacy, the Vatican's stance toward the East changed. Heightened Vatican interest and increased Radio Vatican broadcasting time to East European and Soviet listeners signified that this no longer was a "Church of Silence" toward its Eastern brethren. In Czechoslovakia and Lithuania, in Latvia and East Germany, in the Ukraine as in Poland, Uniate as well as Roman Catholics rallied and took heart from Karol Wojtyla's message; underground churches grew, religious practice became more open, and the faithful more publicly self-assertive:

From the very first day of the election of Karol Wojtyla as Pope John Paul II it was clear to Moscow that it had to deal with a formidable opponent. . . . In the person of Wojtyla the Kremlin rulers found themselves faced with a convinced and outspoken opponent of communist totalitarianism and a man with a proven record of standing up to the regime in the defense of the human rights and dignity of his people.⁶⁵

Even more, his message transcended borders, rejecting Soviet domination of a divided Europe, and emphasized its shared Christian heritage: "The Pope's expressed vision of a Europe united on the basis of Christian ideals,

⁶³ *New York Times*, March 23, 1983.

⁶⁴ Neal Ascherson, *The Polish August: The Self-Limiting Revolution* (New York: Viking Press, 1982), *passim*, is one of the more thorough accounts. Jan Nowak, "The Church in Poland," *Problems of Communism*, January/February 1982, pp. 1-16 present a focused yet broad treatment principally examining the Church in postwar Poland.

⁶⁵ Alex Alexiev, *The Kremlin and The Pope* (Santa Monica: The Rand Corporation, April 1983), p. 2. Alexiev presents an incisive treatment of John Paul II's shift from a "Silent Church" to a "Church Defiant," the larger East European response and the Soviet stakes and reactions.

however unrealistic given existing political realities, is the logical antithesis of Soviet totalitarian ideology and thus an ideological challenge to its very legitimacy."⁶⁶ As Alexiev summed it up elsewhere: "For Moscow, John Paul II was and continues to be much more than a narrow Polish problem."⁶⁷

Much has been made of the handwritten letter in which, according to NBC's *White Paper* of September 21, 1982, the Polish Pope told Brezhnev that "... if the Russians moved against Poland, he would lay down the crown of St. Peter and return to his homeland to stand shoulder to shoulder with his people."⁶⁸ Neal Ascherson in his authoritative book, *The Polish August: The Self-Limiting Revolution* wrote that in early December 1980:

... an official from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Vadim Zagladin, had arrived at the Vatican for discussions. Their content remains a secret, but a few days later two different sources reported that the Pope had told Zagladin that if Poland were invaded he would simply fly home to be with his own people.⁶⁹

Claire Sterling, citing the above report, also states that Cardinal Wyszynski spoke explicitly of the "Holy Father's ... letter to Brezhnev."⁷⁰ Letter or message, the thrust and open challenge of John Paul II's person and words were all too clear to Kremlin rulers who may have believed they faced a formidable and mortal danger.

Global Stakes

The global stakes are enormous. The *New York Times* editorialized: "Assassinations are the poison gas of diplomatic conflict, as dangerous to the user as the victim. . . . The command to eliminate a statesman is the last resort of a bankrupt diplomacy."⁷¹ On one level, the employment of assassination of a world leader is dangerously precedent-setting for, like the first use of poison gas in warfare, it both models and invites emulation by others.

Harry Gelman, Rand Corporation senior staff member and retired assistant national intelligence officer for the USSR and Eastern Europe, posed the stakes on another plane. He asks if the long-held assumption that:

... the Politburo is fundamentally cautious, reluctant to accept serious risks, disinclined to take 'adventurist' actions, and particularly averse to involvement in the

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁶⁷ Alex Alexiev, "The Battle Between the Kremlin and the Pope," *Wall Street Journal*, March 30, 1983.

⁶⁸ *NBC White Paper*, pp. 13-14.

⁶⁹ Ascherson, *The Polish August*, p. 223.

⁷⁰ Sterling, *The Assassins*, p. 123.

⁷¹ *New York Times*, December 18, 1982.

assassination of major Western public figures . . . [proves erroneous]. . . . What dealings with the Soviet Union would then be appropriate? What place would the whole panoply of present Western interactions with the U.S.S.R. — from arms control to commercial relations — have in a universe in which it was known that that was Soviet policy? And if the Soviets would do this, what else would they do? ⁷²

The gravity of changing their assumptions inhibits some; the implications for world stability make others reluctant. But in the end all must confront Gelman's two questions: "What dealings with the Soviet Union would then be appropriate? . . . And, if the Soviets would do this, what else would they do? Any basis for a sound foreign policy, any basis for the accurate assessment of another nation's actions must be realistically grounded. Would a moral Munich, would passive, avoidant, non-judgmental appeasement of such an act be the proper policy? Would a world view of the Soviet Union's behavior that is partial be better than one that is complete? Delay, deferral, ambiguity, ambivalence — all are nearly understandable. One co-author of this article, himself the Ambassador of the United States to Uganda during the reign not only of terror, but horror by Idi Amin, is especially sensitive to the reluctance, the wish to shun, the cruel and tragic nature of the world and some of its inhabitants. But he also came to understand personally the necessity, in the end, to confront such a reality. In the end, this limbo will not be perpetual, and final conclusions will have to be drawn. In the end this question must be confronted and, more than that, will confront each of the globe's governments. When that happens, "We must be the kind of people who are prepared to think that such an evil is possible. We must recover the imagination that the political world requires. Without it, we may be played for suckers. The principles for which we stand may go down if we see them everywhere." ⁷³

The Need for a Reckoning

We have come far quickly. Well-known student of conspiracy Edward Jay Epstein, reviewing the book-length treatments of this affair by Paul B. Henze and Claire Sterling, reflected the skepticism common even until January 1984:

To substantiate their theory [of an Agca-Turkish Mafia-Bulgaria link] Mrs. Sterling and Mr. Henze would have to show not merely that the Bulgarian secret service was in contact with Turkish organizations that dealt with Mr. Agca but that it

⁷² *Washington Post*, December 26, 1982.

⁷³ *The New Republic*, January 24, 1983, p. 7.

purposefully controlled him, directly or through intermediaries, when he shot the Pope. ⁷⁴

There now is such substantiation. The Albano Report, excerpts of which were published on June 10, 1984, stated that though Agca is "a despicable mercenary" and a "liar," yet

Every statement by Agca, every circumstance he reported, every detail offered to the investigation was subjected to verification, to comparison, to checks, to inquiry . . . Agca is convincing in his reconstruction of the historical case of the attempt on the Pope's life. ⁷⁵

Sterling, who has read the as yet unreleased Albano Report in its entirety wrote that: "Judicial belief in Mr. Agca's confession was apparently fortified by a mass of corroborative evidence." ⁷⁶

Here the case now rests. The facts of this affair usually are termed "circumstantial," for they have not yet been presented in a national court of law. This will occur in the near future; for on October 26, 1984, Judge Ilario Martella ordered three Bulgarians and four Turks to stand trial in this case, charging them with complicity in the conspiracy to assassinate Pope John Paul II. Sergei Antonov, Todor Aivazov, and Zhelyo Vasilev are the Bulgarians indicted. Antonov is in Italian custody in Rome; Aivazov and Vasilev are in Bulgaria, a nation with which Italy has no extradition treaty. Of the four Turks who also were indicted, Bekir Celenk also resides in Bulgaria where he is afforded the same protection against extradition; Musa Serdar Celebi and Omer Bagci are in Italian prisons, while Oral Celik has not been seen since May 13, 1981. Aivazov, Vasilev, Celenk, and Celik will be tried in absentia. Mehmet Ali Agca will face separate charges of illegally importing into Italy the pistol he used in St. Peter's Square. Omer Mersan, whose role now appears to be smaller than once believed, lives under police surveillance in Germany.

But the facts already in the public domain — the facts that this article purposefully has presented at such length — are of such a mass as to be undismissible, of such detail as to be unaccidental, and of such a pattern as not to be random. The facts simply will not go away.

Again we ask *Cui bono?* Is the good to be served by silence? Would such behavior by the world community further the good of discouraging the repetition of such an act in the future? Would it serve the good of any nation's proper foreign policy, of any nation's proper assessment of another's behavior? In the nuclear age, as Secretary of State George Shultz recently stated, the United States may need to follow an eclectic policy in its dealings with the Soviet Union. We need to maintain

⁷⁴ *New York Times Book Review*, January 15, 1984, p. 6.

⁷⁵ *New York Times*, June 10, 1984, October 26, 1984.

⁷⁶ *New York Times*, June 10, 1984.

a relationship and to proceed in areas such as arms control talks, despite Soviet behavior in other areas knowing that: "they have acted in ways that violate our standards of human conduct and rule of law and that are repugnant to us — and they will likely continue to do so in the future."⁷⁷

Cui prodest? Who is interested in this affair? The Papacy has a unique and special status in the world because of its universal character. Is this merely a question of the guilt or innocence of the accused individuals? Is the investigation of an attempted assassination of a world religious leader merely the interest, the domain of a national judiciary? Is it not the interest, the domain, the stake of the entire world community? Should not all nations be interested in this affair? We ask these questions, for they have not always been asked in the past. As the *New Republic*, newly noted for its non-dogmatic pursuit of truth, put the issue:

The system of nations is not a system of laws in which you are presumed innocent until proven guilty. Based upon what we now know about the manner in which states vie for power, and about the relationship of means to ends in Soviet history, and about the role of international terrorism in the struggle between East and West, the presumption of guilt is surely as plausible as the presumption of innocence.⁷⁸

At present only one option, only one manner of dealing with this affair conventionally is considered: a state trial of the indicted individuals in the nation, Italy, where the crime occurred. We suggest a second option; we call for a broader investigation. Certainly (and perhaps most particularly) those implicated in the reports and rumors would want at least one world body to report on the facts of what did occur. The United Nations General Assembly consequently should act to appoint a Board of Inquiry with the mandate to carry out a full public investigation of this affair and to issue its own report.

The remarkable evidence of Bulgarian state involvement with strong rumors implying KGB knowledge must be critically studied by the one world body that has a universal membership. The results of this investigation should then be made available to the Italian judicial authorities. It is important that an international body with a universal constituency speak to the facts of this most unusual case involving the alleged complicity of government agencies in an attempt to kill the leader of the Christian community.

In some ways we would wish that this was the single act of a crazed man with no international conspiracy involved. The revelation of a conspiracy could serve to complicate the already sensitive relation-

⁷⁷ *New York Times*, October 31, 1984, citing an excerpt from a speech Secretary of State Shultz delivered in Los Angeles on October 25, 1984.

⁷⁸ *The New Republic*, January 24, 1983, p. 7.

ships between the major powers and the world community at large. But in the spirit of the Declaration of Independence, does not "a decent respect to the opinions of mankind" suggest that the world community through the United Nations "declare the causes" of this affair?

